

Andrew Jackson to Col. Howard, August 4, 1831, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

1 The subscription to the letter is simply "Col. Howard". The passages here set in square brackets are interlineations in Jackson's hand; the rest of the text is in the hand of an amanuensis.

Washington, August 4, 1831.

Private.

My Dear Sir, I have just received yours of the 19th Ult. and, for the frankness and friendship which characterises the communication of the information it contains, I make you a tender of my thanks. It is proper (as I shall be frank in my reply) to remark in reference to Mr. Calhoun that he *once* so fully possessed my confidence and friendship that, when I was installed as President, I consulted him, as I did my cabinet, on matters pertaining to my office. It was but a short time after the formation of my cabinet before I perceived the existence of a disposition, on the part of certain *politicians* harmoniously, that any who could not still harmonise had better withdraw. This attempt would never, in my opinion, have been revived but for the fact of my having detected Mr. Calhoun in his Schemes of duplicity and intrigue, and the conviction on the part of himself and friends that Major Eaton would not aid in his elevation to the Presidency.

When about to organize my first Cabinet, I tendered the Office of Secretary of War to my friend Judge White; but the situation of his family determined him to decline its acceptance. Knowing, as I did, the necessity of having some one near me in whom I *knew* I could, with safety, confide, I was induced to persuade Majr. Eaton—the only capable

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man [remaining], who had my *entire* confidence—to accept it. The conduct of three of my former Cabinet fully manifests the correctness of my reflections and the propriety of my course on this Subject. If the correspondence between Mr. Calhoun and myself had resulted in its effect to produce the realization of "the hopes of the opposition" or the "apprehensions" of the democratic party, the responsibility of it must have rested with others and not on me. It never would have occurred, if Mr. Calhoun had not been secretly manoeuvring to accomplish my destruction, while, as I have before intimated, he professed to entertain for me feelings of the strongest friendship. I was informed again and again that it was Mr. Calhoun, and not Mr. Crawford, who made the motion for my arrest or punishment in the Secret Cabinet Council. This assertion I could not believe; but, when I received the assurance of its truth [as coming] from a source so near President Munroe, I became desirous of seeing a statement on the subject said to have been prepared by Mr. Crawford. I was well convinced that, if the allegations in respect to Mr. Calhoun's conduct were true, he had acted towards me with great duplicity, and was therefore capable of pursuing, at that time, the same line of Conduct. It is no part of my disposition to harbour unpleasant suspicions against one whom I regard my friend, and, it is painful in the extreme, when circumstances compel me to entertain apprehensions of impropriety in the conduct of such an individual. You can now readily perceive the motive which induced me to solicit the perusal of Mr. Crawford's statement, and with my usual frankness, to submit it to Mr. Calhoun. The great surprise of which I was the subject, when he acknowledged his guilt and added insult to injury by insisting that I had transcended my orders, can more easily be imagined than expressed. Mr. Calhoun had a right to act in the Cabinet Co[u]ncil according to the dictates of his own judgment; but, so long as a single spark of honor animates my bosom, I cannot concede to him the right of acting diametrically opposite to his professions. He knew that my orders were a *Chart Blanch*, and that I, as he explained in a letter to Govr. Bibb was authorised to conduct the [War as I might think best].² He was in the full confidence of Mr. Munroe, and must have known that Mr. J. Rhea had, in obedience to the instructions of Mr. Munroe, informed me that the

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President fully concurred in the views expressed in my confidential letter of the 6th Jany. 1818, and which

2 Substituted for "Seminole Campaign as I pleased".

Mr. Calhoun has published without my consent. Aside from the intimacy which existed between Mr. Munroe and Mr. Calhoun, we have the declaration of the latter that he read and handed this letter to the President with the remark that it was on the affairs of Florida and required his attention and answer. It, however, happened that, for some cause which you may conjecture, Mr. J. Rhea (then in Congress, [and at its close in 1819]) was sent to me to request that I would burn the confidential letter which he wrote to me, at the instance of Mr. Munroe, in answer to mine of the 6th of Jany. 1818. 3 Not suspecting any improper design on the part of any one, and, believing that Mr. Munroe and Mr. Calhoun would, if it became necessary, state the contents of this letter of Mr. Rhea which was written in persuance of their wishes, I consented to burn it, and accordingly did so, on my return home. This promise [had been made] known to Mr. Calhoun [as I believe,] and, he therefore presumed that, as the letter was destroyed, he could now insist that I had transcended my orders, and [that I] could not perhaps establish the fact that I had ever recd. a letter of that description. In this he has been mistaken as I have, in my possession, incontravertable evidence of the fact. You may remember that I stated [in the correspondence] in a reply to one of Mr. Calhoun's letters, that, when time would permit, and the documents were at hand, I would give an expose of this matter very different from the colouring which he found it necessary to give it. This pledge I will, at a proper time, redeem, and I entertain no fears as to the result. Could I any longer have confidence in Mr. Calhoun after I was [thus] convinced of his deception, etc.? He hoped by the publication of his *book* , 4 through the influence of his Agents Duff Green, Ingham, Branch and Berrien, etc., to distract the republican party, to prostrate me, and thus step into the Presidential chair.

3 Vol. II., p. 345.

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4 *Correspondence between Gen. Andrew Jackson and John C. Calhoun, President and Vice President of the United States, on the Subject of the Course of the latter, in the Deliberations of the Cabinet of Mr. Monroe, on the Occurrences in the Seminole War* (Washington, Duff Green, 1831).

He could not brook the idea of my re-election, and feared that Mr. Van Buren would acquire too much popularity by his assiduous [and faithful] discharge of the duties confided to him. Hence Mr. Calhoun's willingness to prevent, *secretly*, the confirmation of some of my nominations to the Senate, to defeat the passage of certain national measures which I recommended to Congress, and finally the effort to convince the people that Mr. Van Buren was [a plotter], an "intriguer," etc. and, [by these false reports to] drive him from my Cabinet. You are pleased to remark that Mr. Ingham was my original friend, my champion, when champions were needed [Pennsylvania never so understood him], and that he could not be forgotten. We are only entitled to merit and consideration for our actions when they are prompted by pure and correct motives [and based upon principle]. The whole career of Mr. Ingham, Duff Green, etc., since my election, convinces me that they only supported me for the purpose of prostrating Adams and Clay and paving the way to the gratification of Mr. Calhoun's restless ambition. I regret, as much as you can, that these men have proven themselves unworthy of my confidence. I think you are mistaken in supposing that the reorganization of my Cabinet will not secure concert of action and harmony in its councils. Under the impression that Messers Lewis and Kendall are the "*adherents* and *partizans*" of Mr. Van Buren, you suggest the propriety of their retirement from Office in order to secure harmony. This is an opinion, which, I have no doubt, you honestly entertain; but the conduct of these gentlemen, so far as my observation enables me to determine, will not authorize the conclusion that they are or have been the partizans of Mr. Van Buren. It is true [that from his high order of talents, his frankness and pure republican principles he has, as he deserves, the confidence of all who appreciate true merit, and it is also true] that charges of this description have been made against them; but where and when has any proof been adduced sufficient to sustain them? It is my fixed determination,

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so far as I can, to prevent any interference in the State elections or the "making of Presidents," on the part of the officers of the general government. These are matters which belong *exclusively* to the people who are sufficiently enlightened to make their own Selections. But while I act on this principle would it not be unjust to remove competent and faithfull officers, in whom I had confidence, merely because they are charged by their enemies with being the partizans of this or that man? [Which of my friends is it that is not charged in the same manner?] When I am convinced of an impropriety in the conduct of *any* public officer, I will, regardless of consequences, discharge my duty; but I cannot consent to remove these men on the *ipse dexit* of those whose interest it is to misrepresent their conduct. I feel well assured that you would not require me to observe any other course of conduct than that which I have prescribed to myself. It is correct in principle and therefore must, as it doub[t]less does, meet your approbation. In conclusion I will barely state that the "expose" of Ingham, Berrien, etc., is of itself sufficient evidence to convince the mind of all unprejudiced men that they have *combined* together to injure me, and will not hesitate to assert any thing (however false it may be) in order to accomplish their purpose. It is unfortunate that, when conversing with these men, I had not always had with me an individual who could correct their gross misrepresentations and vile slanders. Truth must however eventually prevail notwithstanding the difficulties against which she has often to struggle, [and permit me to assure you that Ingham is prostrate in his own state, and Berriens course meets the frowns of all good men.

I am with great respect yr. mo. obdt. servt.]

[P. S. I write in great haste surrounded with business. the duties of my office gives me but little time for friendship. A. J.]